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ABSTRACT

The new legislative act "No Child Left Behind" is currently infiltrating the states and schools with numerous requirements that must be met to improve test scores which they say measure reading acquisition. Assumptions are made that previous methods of teaching reading have been inadequate, so new federal guidelines have now been offered in hopes of rectifying this problem. Current efforts still do not address the problem. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 39% of public school students in 2000 were considered to be part of a minority group, and predictions are for this percentage to increase rapidly over the next 10 years. The problem is that the reading material is written to address the "mainstream" culture, assumed to be the white middle class. The solution lies in addressing the cultural gap present in the reading instruction material and general understanding of various cultures in the United States. The nation must work toward "cultural proficiency" to encompass all cultures in hope of developing a stronger nation which educates, respects, and embraces everyone. This paper reflects on the present conditions of reading instruction materials in schools across the United States and the impact of culture in construction of meaning. The hope in the paper is to bring awareness to the forefront so that each person can take responsibility and contribute in moving the schools, and society in general, toward a more responsive, culturally sound environment. (Contains 25 references.) (NKA)

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Working Toward Cultural Responsiveness in the New Millennium

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Abstract: **Working Toward Cultural Responsiveness in the New Millennium**

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There is a major push in the United States to ensure that all children learn to read. The new legislative act *No Child Left Behind* is currently infiltrating the states and schools with numerous requirements that must be met to improve test scores which they say measures reading acquirement. Assumptions are made that previous methods of teaching reading have been inadequate, so new federal quidelines have now been offered in hopes of rectifying this grave problem.

The current efforts still do not address the problem. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, 39 percent of public school students in 2000 were considered to be part of a minority group. This percentage has more than doubled since 1972 and is predicted to continue to increase rapidly over the next ten years.

Here lies the problem. The reading material is written to address the "mainstream" culture, which has been assumed to be the white middle class. As the statistics show, the predominant 'white' culture is less pervasive, and more students than ever before have difficulty identifying with the mainstream material. New mandates with powerful threats if the outcomes are not met do not address the issues at hand. New scripted reading programs are not the solution. The solution lies in addressing the cultural gap present in the reading instruction material and general understanding of various cultures in the US.

If we want America's children to learn to read we must respect and embrace the many unique cultures of each child. Today's reading curriculum ignores the core of cultures other than the white middle class. If this is not changed, then we will continue to see minority students marginalized in schools.

In order to understand the need for change in schools, first we must understand the steps that must be taken in order to make life-altering changes and commitments. Our nation must work toward *cultural proficiency* to encompass all cultures in the hopes of developing a stronger nation which educates, respects, and embraces everyone.

Working Toward Cultural Responsiveness in the New Millennium

Author: Patricia K. Dean
April 2002

As we head full force into the 21st Century, we tend to take a look back to see how we can improve our steps forward. As I reflect, I see a shadow hovering over our country in terms of unfairness in addressing the various cultures of our students in schools across the United States. It is my hope that this article will bring awareness to the forefront and we can all take personal responsibility and contribute in moving our schools, and society in general, toward a more responsive, culturally sound environment.

What is Cultural Identity?

I can still remember the moment when I was asked about my culture. I felt proud to say that I had none. I was so shallow and unfamiliar with the actuality of life going on around me. As I read, today, on others who state the same, I realize how naive I was to think that I was immune to culture, and that I was so humble as to not have one. Now I realize that it is just part of the white, middle-class, mainstream attitude that is all, simultaneously, *cultureless* and THE CULTURE.

Everyone has a cultural identity, yet many white, middle-class people are quick to admit they have none. In actuality, they are surrounded with their own culture, and it is so familiar to them that they fail to recognize it as their own. The white middle-class culture is often referred to as "mainstream", and it dominates the American society. It permeates schools, the media, advertising, and mass market. It is taken for granted by the white, middle-class community, often not even recognized, but expected, yet it is often flagrant and blatant to cultures outside of this discourse.

Culture, as denoted in the Webster Dictionary (p.359), is *"...8. The concepts, habits, skills, arts, instruments, institutions, etc. of a given people in a given period; civilization."* From another perspective, culture must be conceptualized as a system of meaning (Goncu and Katsarou, 2000). It is not to be seen as a variable that exerts an effect on development, but rather an entity that is intertwined within development and cannot be separated. "Culture does not have to be defined in terms of race, ethnicity, or national boundary. Rather, a culture refers to a group of people with shared understandings" (p.223).

Lev Vygotsky was the first modern psychologist to suggest that culture becomes a part of each person's nature (Vygotsky, 1978, p.6).

> "The schism between natural scientific studies of elementary processes and speculative reflection on cultural forms of behavior might be bridges by tracing the qualitative changes in behavior occurring in the course of development...the internalization of culturally produced sign systems brings about behavioral transformations and forms the bridge between early and later forms of individual development...the mechanism of individual change is rooted in society and culture (p. 7).

Culturelessness

So many mainstream, white middle-class people fail to recognize their own culture. As stated by Anne McGill-Franzen (2000):

> "Look at the structure of the word *diverse*, from the Latin *divertere*; it literally means *turned in the opposite directions*. When we speak of diversity, we often speak of others whose culture is visible, who are turned away from the mainstream in highly visible ways. White teachers in the United States, for example, like members of dominant cultures everywhere, think of ourselves as not having a culture. What we experience seems so natural, it is almost invisible to us. Diversity in the new millennium may change us, transforming what we see" (p.550).

Pamela Perry conducted a study entitled: *White means never having to say you're ethnic.* (2001) over a two-year period. Her research encompassed 2 school districts, one whose student population was predominantly white (Valley Groves), and the other, of similar class status, whose white population was a minority group (Clavey).

Many of the students at the predominantly white school, Valley Groves, called themselves cultureless. They denied ties to any traditions, ancestries, and ethnicities. These students felt that their cultureless practice was taken for granted, creating what was deemed normal and natural. Perry states,

> "(It) is not so much about whether there is or is not a white culture but about the power whites exercise when claiming they have no culture. Culturelessness can serve, even unintentionally, as a measure of white racial superiority. It suggests that one is either 'normal' and 'simply human' (therefore, the standard to which others should strive) or beyond culture or 'post cultural' (therefore, developmentally advanced).Only those who deviate form the norm have 'culture'." (p.57)

Her findings from Clavey were somewhat different, mainly because this school was predominantly African-American, with the white population only accounting for 12% of the student body. Here, white was not the norm, either culturally or numerically. These white students were able to articulate about white culture, even if it was only to know how difficult it is to define, but they were definitely aware of a difference in culture. Perry states,

> "Several whites students told me that they did not like to think about themselves as 'white' but as 'human'. These students also expressed a more explicitly rationalist construction of whiteness that denied the significance of a past orientation and exalted a more individualistic and present- or future-oriented construction of self. White, middle-class boys expressed this most boldly, which might be expected given that they are triply constructed as the most rational by race, class, and gender" (p.71). ..."Many of the white students felt as if school was like a foreign country to them, and they felt comfortable only when they went home, where it was 'normal'. One student remarked how much more visible white culture is outside of California, '...Minnesota, Denver, and places like that' " (p.69).

Major defining cultural divisions at Clavey were the music, clothing, and language. White students generally liked rock, punk, or alternative music, and not the rap or R & B. Students also identified clothing as a major cultural factor, with 'normal' being not oversized, baggy clothes like the skaters wear, and no cowboy boots or hats.

As I read through Perry's research findings, I felt that I understood their vagueness regarding culture. It was not long ago that I would have answered in a similar fashion to many of their comments. I remember saying that I care about the individual, not emphasizing the culture of a person, and that I looked upon myself as 'human' rather than an ethnic being. This seemed fair to me, to judge each person as an individual, not as a 'group'. I find it interesting that this response from the white culture is somewhat universal. Why? It is not something that I ever discussed with other whites, or anyone else at all. Somehow the white, middle class society has identified a similar response to recognizing (or not recognizing) their culture. I have grown wiser, and now realize that culture is not an additive, but a core quality that shapes the person form birth through the present and future. It IS the person, and it is important to recognize our culture, as well as all cultures.

Impact of Culture in Construction of Meaning

We have determined that culture is influenced in each of us by the people and environment in which we grow and learn. As we become literate human beings, the impact of culture plays a major role in how we make meaning of the world, and how we understand and develop literacy practices.

Lev Vygotsky (1978) concludes:

> "We have found that sign operations appear as a result of a complex and prolonged process subject to all the basic laws of psychological evolution. *This means that sign-using activity in children is neither simply invented nor passed down by adults:* rather, it arises from something that is originally not a sign operation and becomes one only after a series of *qualitative* transformations. Each of these transformations provides the conditions for the next stage and is itself conditioned by the preceding one; thus, transformations are linked like stages of a single process, and are historical in nature" (p. 45-46).

As we think about making meaning and adding signs to convey this meaning, it appears that this comes from within oneself. Outside experiences, the very root of culture, are the groundwork of the internalization process which evolves within one, from infancy on, to make meaning and add signs. Each individual uses this system in order to make sense of the world.

Peter Smagorinsky (2001) wrote about 'what it means to mean." He determines that 'when something has meaning, it stands for something else.' (p.133). Smagorinsky concludes that as meaning is made, these constructions are culturally mediated, drawing inferences form the person's cultural history, among other sources. Culture provides the basis for meaning. He defines culture as "the recurring social practices and their artifacts that give order, purpose, and continuity to social life." (p. 139). People are products of culture.

In relationship to reading, Smagorinsky, taking a constuctivist approach, states that understanding takes place through the relationship between the reader and the text. Therefore, it is "impossible to become acultural as a reader or producer of texts. Rather, one's notion of meaning emerges through participation in cultural practices" (p. 144). This leads one to assume that missing from our non-mainstream students is the connection to their culture, or the lack of understanding on the part of the teacher in recognizing the connection, albeit different from that of the teacher's or the expectation of the 'purchased curriculum'.

Culture plays a major role in text interpretation. Louise Rosenblatt (1978) explains it this way:

> "Readers bring to the text different personalities, different syntactical and semantic habits, different values and knowledge, different cultures, will under its guidance and control fashion different syntheses, live through different 'works'."

The logical consequence of this statement would have one understand how the non-mainstream student becomes marginalized when the construction of meaning by interpretation of text is based on one's own experiences, which are not necessarily the experiences of the white middle-class discourse. If our minority students are to succeed, we must begin taking into account the way these students' construct meaning and respond to text, valuing where they have originated, and not expect each student to reiterate the same

interpretation of text. As Weaver and Brinkley remind parents in their chapter *Phonics, Whole Language, and the Religious and Political Right* (Goodman, 1998),

> "..(M)eaning is not in the text, but rather in the head of the author and the reader, who transact with the text to construct meaning...Reading and discussing together a short article from a newspaper may be sufficient to encourage people to realize that reading is a product of readers' transactions with text" (p.134).

Remediation or Cultural Void?

Have you ever noticed who is in the remedial reading groups in public schools? It is not predominantly the white middle-class student, but the marginal ones, either low-income level or minority students. Teachers must learn how to reach these students by helping them make personal connections to literacy. It seems obvious to me that by using the mandated curriculum, which follows the white middle-class discourse, we miss connecting with non-mainstream students. In my opinion, not only are we limiting these students by immersing them in a culture that is irrelevant to them, but we are simultaneously undermining their self-respect and confidence as we prevail with the white middle-class infrastructure and expect them to relate to it, understand it, conform to it, and respond to it. Different does not mean less than, yet we continually make these students feel insubordinate because they are not comfortable with the mainstream model. As teachers, we must tie their culture into the literacy learning, through choice of literature and freedom to respond with their own personal connections, to give them a fair and equal opportunity to become active, literate people.

Our schools must focus on emerging abilities rather than emphasize remediation techniques. Paulo Freire (1970) worked intensely in Third World countries, and was successful by adapting the educational methods to meet the historical and cultural settings of the students he taught. I propose we follow this lead as we embark on the 21st Century, facing more marginalized minorities in our schools each year.

The number of children who speak other languages and have limited proficiency in English in U.S. schools has risen dramatically over the past two decades and continues to grow (Snow, 1998).These students make up about 5.5 percent of the public school population, and over half of these students reside in grades K-4. Hispanic students make up the biggest portion of this group by far (p. 28). They are particularly at risk for reading difficulties, with the language difference being the prime factor. "These children might not have any difficulty at all if they were taught and tested in the language in which they are proficient," suggests Snow.(p.28). Other cultural differences, such as the way a particular culture views literacy, are also hindrances to learning to read in English (p.29).

Jimenez recently conducted a study literacy and identity development for Latina/o students (2000).Several interesting results surfaced. The students felt that going from home to school was like living on a border between two countries, and, determining which direction they went, they would use that language. There was also a fear that if they became immersed in the English language, they would forget their Spanish. Jimenez explains his findings:

> "Perhaps one of the conclusions that might be drawn concerning these students' emerging sense and understanding of their identities was that they were a bit unsure and insecure concerning who they were. The fragility and their sense of self surfaced on occasion when students mentioned that English might supplant Spanish and when they hinted that literacy development itself was a language-specific activity, either Spanish or English. Comments like that of Petra indicate a bit of this ambivalence toward both English language learning and its relationship to literacy. Christopher made the most telling comment in the following excerpt. Forgetting to read in Spanish and forgetting the Spanish language altogether, was not only something these children feared, it was a reality that some were observing or had observed in their own families.
>
> Interviewer: *When you read in English, does it help that you know how to read in Spanish?*
> Christopher: *No.*
> Interviewer: *It doesn't? Not at all? OK. That's possible. Umm, do you think, does it cause problems?*
> Christopher: *It does. You can forget to read in Spanish* (p.988).

The majority of teachers working with minority students are European American (National Education Association 1990, as cited in Jimenez, 2000).They receive little specific training for working with students from culturally and linguistically diverse communities (Jimenez, p. 994). We must encourage minorities to enter the teaching field to help the students bridge the gap between cultures, by adding empathy, personal experiences, and identifying with the students. Jimenez shares a conversation with a student on her feelings about her teachers:

> "Maria poignantly described the ambivalence and general apprehension felt by many of the students as they developed their English language proficiency. The motivation on the part of the student is palpable and her desire to attain higher levels of literacy and English language proficiency instructive. Educational personnel who are not trained in second language acquisition, or bilingual and multicultural education, however, seldom treat her fear explicitly" (p.989).

Lack of teacher understanding of cultural differences can lead to negativity within a community, and within the schools, effecting parents, faculty and students.

"Toxic Cultures" is a term used by Peterson and Deal (1998) to describe the negativity and unproductively that has effected some schools. The negative attitudes may stem from teachers or parents or both. Often the focus at the school has shifted from student to adult (p. 28). As this story unfolds, there is hope for returning to a positive culture, where staff share a common vision, and laughter, storytelling, and dedication flourish. A few schools are high-lighted where extensive positive collaboration have taken place, creating an environment conducive to learning for all cultures. In Arizona, a primary school was considered one of the worst in the state. "Now the culture is one that supports learning for its Navajo students, professional innovation for its staff, and meaningful parent involvement fore its community" (p. 29). A school in Texas within a largely Hispanic community has made connections with the student population and the community by creating powerful cultural traditions, such as "Fabulous Friday", which provides a wide

variety of courses and activities. "Parent University" provides courses and in the process builds trust (p.30).

> "Without supportive, student-centered cultures, reforms will falter, staff morale and commitment will wither, and student learning will slip…School leaders do several things when sculpting culture. First, they *read the culture*-its history and current condition. Leaders should know the deeper meanings embedded in schools before trying to reshape it. Second, leaders *uncover and articulate* core values…Finally, leaders work to *fashion a positive context*, reinforcing cultural elements that are positive and modifying those that are negative and dysfunctional. Positive school cultures are never monolithic or overly conforming, but core values and shared purpose should be pervasive and deep" (p.30).

I am not as familiar with the cultural conflict of race, as my small northwestern PA school is predominantly white, with very few other races represented. Nonetheless, our remedial reading room is full of students; students from working-class families, single-parent families, and poor families. These students bring with them their own cultural literacy background, which is more than likely quite different from the mainstream student's.

In her book *Reading Lives*, Deborah Hicks (2002) shares the culture and literacy learning of two children from working-class environments. Through her story-telling of Jake and Lee Ann, she reflects,

> "(There are) processes of socialization that involve language practices, ways of acting, values, and beliefs. (These) reflect the working-class practices and values of the community in which they lived…The cultural continuity of practices and values shared among generations was stable and consistent…Through particular forms of expression, Jake and Lee Ann were being socialized into ways of being, knowing, talking, acting, and feeling…These culturally specific ways with words… are related in important ways to how children engage with school literacies. It is not just children's preschool engagements with written texts, per se, that make such a difference once they enter school, nor even their engagements with stories and other types of oral literacies. Rather, it is the entire cultural web-a cat's cradle, if you will-of language practices and identities that so importantly have an impact on school learning, including literacy learning."

As responsible educators, we must celebrate the cultural aspect of these children's lives. Let us build on the knowledge that they bring to school and progress in forward motion, continuing their language development that they have brought to school.

New Nemesis to Reading Achievement: Infusion of National Reading Instruction

History

Today, more than any other time in history, our national government is providing federal funding for following federal guidelines in the teaching of reading. Is there a reading crisis? No, not really. However, many Americans have been lead to believe that there is (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). According to Berliner and Biddle, we are in the waves of a "Manufactured Crisis" (1995). They trace this 'crisis' to originate in the 1970s, when a group of wealthy people, such as the Olins and Coors, among others, began to work together to create a right-wing agenda in America. They used their money "to 'sell' reactionary views: funding right-wing student newspapers, internships, and endowed chairs for right-wing spokespersons on American campuses; supporting authors who write books hostile to American higher education; attempting to discredit social programs and other products of 'liberal thought'; supporting conservative religious causes; lobbying for reactionary programs and ideologies in the federal Congress, and so forth" (p. 133). This group has grown to include the Far Right , the Religious Right, (both criticize the government for involvement in the schools; they feel that schools should be de-publicized and separate from government-driven roles),and the Neoconservatives (who are in favor of the federal government having a strong role in education to insure that schools carry out their mission). All of these hold very narrow, conservative views of right and wrong, mainly aimed at education in a negative way (p. 135-137).

Underlying Purpose?

The right-wing group grew stronger as they funded large organizations that frequently expressed their right-wing ideas. Some of the organizations who received funding were

The Heritage Foundation, the Hudson Institute, the American Enterprise Institute, the Hoover Institute, the Manhattan Institute, and the Madison Center for Educational Affairs. These organizations have grown to be influential and thus make an impact on America, not only because they are well-funded, but also because they make use of the press; and because they provide a forum for people who would later serve in important federal positions (Berliner 7 Biddle, 1995, p. 133).

Groups such as The Heritage Foundation use propagandic terms, like calling public education 'a vice-like monopoly' in order to encourage the privatization of education. They want to open up certain segments of education to profit-making businesses (Goodman, 1998, p. 9).

Denny Taylor states that there is:

> "...a political campaign that is taking place to change the minds of Americans about how young children learn to read... Large corporations market 'scientific treatments' and make immense profits, while behind the scenes powerful political lobbyists smile cynically at one another as they congratulate themselves on the success they have had at pulling everyone's strings" (1998, p. xxii).

The right-wing has long been opposed to anything sounding like 'whole language'. This conservative group does not welcome free thinking of students, but wishes for education to be controlled and formalized, offering more specific instruction. Their money and power have given the whole language philosophy an unfair bad image. As their power grew, they began to make a statement against whole language, pushing for a 'back to basics' movement. The right-wing had specific content to offer students, and did not welcome open-ended thinking, preferring instead for a controlled curriculum with a regulated outcome. Phonics is a key word used in statements from the right-wing followers. Weaver & Brinkley (1998) state:

> "We wish to explore why phonics has such an appeal for the religious right and to consider whether, or to what extent, phonics is the real issue (p. 128-129)...Phonics is associated with tradition, with morality and

ethics, with order and structure, and with the assumption that what is taught is automatically learned-the transmission model of education (p.130)."

California's Influence

The right-wing group's big break came in California in 1996. In May 1986, Bill Honig, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction in California, launched a reading initiative embracing a literature-based reading program and moving away from a skill-based reading program (Freeman & Freeman, 1998). Honig stated that "there was alarming new research on illiteracy in America...without a profound change in direction, most American school children will not become life-long readers" (p.75). In 1987, California took an official position of the whole language approach. Teachers were asked to change their reading practices to support this new initiative.

The demise of this initiative occurred due to four key factors: pressure from testing; pressures from administrators, parents, and some teachers (especially teachers who resisted the change to whole language or were not provided training on the philosophy that accompanies it); pressures in the changes in the student population (45.6 percent in the Los Angeles schools and 69.3 percent at Santa Ana District were English learners) , and finally, the limited school budgets (Freeman & Freeman, 1998, p. 79). This left no money for good literature to add to school libraries and classrooms, and for teacher in-servicing, in either whole language practices or English as a second language training. Regie Routman contends that additional factors at fault were no mandatory or uniform staff development for teachers, and the fact that California has the largest class size in the nation (1996). All of these factors combined to prevent the growth anticipated in California.

Ten years later, Honig left his position in disgrace. Whole language was blamed and abandoned in California. He quickly changed his philosophy, now advocating that for young readers, at least, literature and values are out; skills and controlled texts are back in (Freeman & Freeman, 1998, p.74).

It is important to note here that a report on September 13, 1995 stated that a California government official attributed the problem with whole language not to whole language per se, but to the fact that only 2 percent of teachers were exposed to whole language principles through in-service sessions (Murphy, 1998, p. 165).

Scientifically Based Reading Research

In 1997, the United States Congress asked the Director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) and the U.S. Secretary of Education to select a panel of 15 people to serve on the National Reading Panel (NRP). Their purpose was to sift through research studies to determine the best ways of teaching reading. The panel was heavily laden with university professors, and there was 1 medical doctor and no reading teacher (Yatvin, 2002). The first meeting of the panel was held in April of 1998. Joanne Yatvin was herself a member of the Panel, and has since written her response of the experience in the Phi Delta Kappan Journal (2002).

> "Without debate, the panel accepted as the basis for investigations a model composed of a three-part hierarchy: decoding, fluency, and comprehension. This skills model posits that learners begin to read by separating out the individual sounds of language and matching them to written letters and combinations of letters. Learners then move on to decoding words and stringing them together into sentences. ...Understanding emerges from correct pronunciation...All of the scientist members held the same general view of the reading process. With no powerful voices from other philosophical camps on the panel, it was easy for this majority to believe that theirs was the only legitimate view...Despite minor differences from time to time, this hierarchy-of-skills model was always the official view of the panel...For scientists to take such a quick and unequivocal stance favoring the hierarchy-of-skills model was disturbing (p. 366)...(The panel) excluded any lines of research that were not part of this model, among them how children's knowledge of oral language, literature, and its conventions and the world apart from print affects their ability to learn to read. It also excluded any investigation of the interdependence between reading and writing and of the effects of the types, quality, or amounts of material children read. Contrary to the interpretations made by many politicians, members of the press, and ordinary citizens, the NRP report does not-and cannot- repudiate instructional practices that make use of any of these components because the research studies on them were never examined (367)...As time wound down, the effects of insufficient time and support were all too apparent...Three years might have allowed the panel to

> investigate thoroughly all the topics it had originally identified (p.368)...(T)he phonics report was not finished by the January 31 (2000) deadline. NICHD officials, who wanted it badly, gave the subcommittee more time without informing the other subcommittees of this special dispensation. The phonics report in its completed form was not seen, even by the whole subcommittee, of which I was a member, until February 25, four days before the full report was to go to press. By that time, not even the small, technical errors could be corrected, much less the logical contradictions and imprecise language...Most of the report was submitted 'as is.' Thus the phonics report became part of the full report of the NRP uncorrected, undeliberated, and unapproved...As I feared, since April 2000, when the report of the National Reading Panel was released, it has been carelessly read and misinterpreted on a grand scale...Government agencies at all levels are calling for changes in school instruction and teacher education derived from the 'science' of the NRP report. NICHD has done its part to misinform the public by disseminating a summary booklet...which in addition to being inaccurate about the actual findings, tout the work in a manner more akin to commercial advertising than to scientific reporting" (p. 369).

We must keep in mind that one of the major flaws in the National Reading Panel's findings, in addition to the major time crunch and lack of variety of panelist representations, is the method of research used. Most natural scientist researchers are realists, not positivists. They look for a clear understanding of cause-and-effect relationships, building on previous layers to derive a deeper understanding. This panel, however, engaged in a positivist perspective, looking for certainty (Cunningham, 2001). Jim Cunningham states,

> "I fear the philosophy of science that begins and permeates the NRP Report may have a chilling effect on the funding, publication, and influence of all reading research that fails to follow the positivist methodological standards it prescribes for our field" (2001, p. 329).

Cunningham's responses to the Panel's findings and recommendations for instruction of Phonological Awareness (p.332) are:

> "When the first finding of the report is based primarily on short-term dependent measures of words in isolation that are not scientifically linked in a causal chain to appropriate long-term measures, the onus is on the panel....(The panel's) often mechanistic approach to selection, analysis, and interpretation of studies did not readily allow them to consult their professional judgment of what children actually need and when they need it, so their findings usually contain the implicit assumption that more and earlier are better...I contend that the burden of proof is with the Panel to show that research-based practices such as

> shared reading of books that play with sounds, writing with invented spelling, and teaching onsets using a variety of activities (key actions, students' names, and key foods and beverages) do not help most children develop the necessary phonemic awareness they need. Until this happens, the Panel's rush to standardization of how and when to best develop the essentials of phonemic awareness should be ignored or opposed" (p. 332).

Gerald Coles, in his book, *Misreading Reading: The Bad Science that Hurts Children*, tells us that:

> "a close look at the skills-emphasis research reveals that below a veneer of adherence to scientific standards is an extensive pattern of faulty research designs, data, logic, and interpretations that offer little support for the strong conclusions about the 'scientific' findings that have been proclaimed" (p. xvii).

In the fall of 1998, the Reading Excellence Act was signed into law. This federal mandate placed more rigorous restrictions on the nation's schools by allocating monies to schools who followed suit with the recommendations of the most recent scientifically-based reading research (Allington, 2001, p.12). Thus continues the current restrictions of teachers and schools in the methods to engage students in literacy education.

Implications for Minority Students

Here lies the quandary. The scientific research has been misinterpreted and the defining course for reading instruction has resulted in isolated drill and skill and specific text interpretation (Coles, 2000). Additionally, failure for the student to interpret text as expected results in low assessment scores (Smagorinsky, 2001).This disallows for cultural interpretations and differences in understanding. There is no room for personal connection and meaningful inferences, unless they fall into the realm prescribed by the purchased curriculum, now frequently used in specific states (Taylor, 1998, p. 241). Smagorinsky (2001) emphasizes that, "..(I)t is impossible to become acultural as a reader or producer of texts. Rather, one's notion of meaning emerges through participation in cultural practice"

(p.144). Yet the current reading issues ignore this, forcing all students to follow the same prescribed curriculum to ensure proper instruction.

How does the scientific research effect the cultural and social lives of our students? Taylor (1998) suggests that the research is not responsive to either the social or cultural needs.

> "In most of the studies...that I have read, there is a major problem with cultural uniformity. Culture is flat, a constant variable. Everybody has it, nobody is different...no attention is paid to the possibility that the treatments might have different significance for children whose cultures are European, African, Hispanic, or Asian American, or that the tests may not be applicable or appropriate for these children" (p. 35-36).

G. Reid Lyon, the Director of the NICHD, offered a scary view of his perspective of inner-city children and literacy while speaking at the meeting of the Education Committee of the California Assembly, May 8, 1996:

> "The language interactions they've had at home are nil. They've never even heard these sound systems. Are they lousy readers? A lot of them are. Are they genetically predisposed? Some of them are, making that combination a tough one to treat" (Taylor, 1998, p.192-193).

Taylor (1998) responds:

> "The man that the federal government has provided 104 million dollars of taxpayers' money to study how young children learn to read has just made what sounds to me like a racist statement, and no one at the hearing has said a word...The statement that Lyon made sickens me, and I keep wondering why members of the California State Assembly, some of whom represent parents and children who live in inner-city poverty, do not express their concern"...When Fuzzy Zoeller made a racially derogatory comment about Tiger Woods, it was front page news, and it was replayed endlessly on CNN Headline News. The golfer lost his contract for a professional endorsement, and he had to make a public apology. But when a powerful, government-funded scientist makes a racist statement, there is no one around to rush to the defense of the children...and the scientist does not lose his endorsement from the federal government. Instead, he becomes even more powerful and his research, which is racially indefensible, becomes even more 'scientifically' acceptable to those who want to change the way in which young children learn to read-especially the children in our inner cities

> (p193)... "Many of us find it impossible to discuss 'best practices' with Lyon because he holds such a deficit view, or perhaps more accurately, a racist view, of inner-city kids" (p. xviii).

It is my opinion that our nation is in deep trouble if we allow public statements like Lyon's to be made and nothing is done to stop them or correct them. Lyon has used his power to influence many people. It is truly scary to think that this person is responsible for, at least in part, the current reading mandates that are driving curriculum in our country, especially knowing his biases in research, cultural differences, and reading philosophies.

Re-Think Racism

We have slipped into mediocrity, status quo, in regards to accepting racial practices. The 'norm' has become to expect certain behaviors from certain racial heritages. It is time to re-think what racism is, listen for the undercurrents that continue the patterns, and become aware of behaviors that perpetuate the misnomers. Step-by-step we can begin to make changes in societal ways to eradicate the unfairness of everyday racism, albeit subconsciously for many.

Mica Pollock conducted an ethnographic study in a California school (2001). Pollock's major findings suggest that educators and lay people tend to hold 'others' responsible for the racial achievement patterns we except. Until we each take responsibility in realizing that each of us has played a role in this stereotyping, we will not be able to determine how collectively we can avoid these racial patterns (p.2).

> "Tentatively, this article also begins to explore the role of educational research in promoting both tendencies-and it suggests in conclusion that both asking and suppressing can actually play a role in naturalizing the very racial patterns we abhor. Our downfall, I submit, is our explanatory habits. While both researchers and everyday analysts deem to expect the emergence of racial achievement patterns, we tend to name existing patterns only when holding other players responsible for them" (pp.2-3).

Pollock found that the blame was passed around, depending on who was assigning 'blame', to explain the various achievement patterns. Teachers, students and parents blamed the 'district' for assigning the low-achieving students, low-income students to *this* school rather than the small group of 'academic' schools within the city. This allowed for the blame to be spread to the fault of 'economics'. The adults at the school blamed 'culture' and 'parents' for the problems. The parents and students blamed the 'teachers' for being racist.

In conclusion, Pollock made some critical analyses:

> "Racial patterns do not go away simply because they are ignored. Indeed, once people have *noticed* racial patterns, they seem to become engraved on the brain. They become, most dangerously, acceptable-a taken-for-granted part of what school is about...(D)escribing a racial achievement pattern matter-of-factly, in research or in everyday life of schooling, always risks reinforcing an ingrained American assumption that race groups *will naturally* achieve differently (Frazier, 1995, cited in Pollock, 2001)...American racism has always framed racial achievement patterns as natural facts. We thus risk making racial achievement patterns in our schools seem normal both by talking about them matter-of-factly, and by refusing to talk about them at all...(T)he trick to actively *denaturalize* racial achievement patterns; to name them and claim them as things we, together, have produced and allowed (Pollock, 2000, pp.9-10, cited in Pollock, 2001).
>
> As we continue to struggle to understand and eliminate local and national racial achievement patterns, thus, we must knowledge that the naturalization of such patterns is endemic to American schooling discourse, including academic research. In response, we must start following the lead of those analysts among us-both professional and lay-who argue explicitly and passionately that racial patterns are never natural orders, and that they thus can and must be collectively dismantled....we must also forge an urgent language of communal responsibility, for only such a language will unify rather than divide various players in the common task of making such patterns go away " (p. 10).

As concerned, caring and passionate educators, seeking justice and fairness to mankind, we must help to share this vision, even if it is in small steps, in hopes of eventually eradicating the unjust system now imposed on students, both actively and passively. Pollock has opened the doors for change. It seems like a surmountable task to overcome, however. Nonetheless, it is crucial to take steps immediately to constitute a change of action.

Providing Literacy Instruction that is Culturally Responsive

The job of providing a culturally responsive learning environment while meeting the standards being imposed on schools is a challenge. Kathryn Au offers this vision:

> " Skills would be taught in context, students would have multiple opportunities to work in small groups, and students would have choices about the tasks in which they engaged. Students would read and critique texts created from multimedia and written from a variety of points of view that reflected the diversity of their racial, social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. Teachers would be knowledgeable about students' backgrounds and design literacy instruction in a culturally responsive manner" (Au, 1998).

The opposite perspective is the current national movement toward standards, which focuses on such ideas as:

> "increased competition, and hegemonic relationships. Cultural differences are considered problematic because they detract from the overall hierarchy structure...Not only would assessment be designed to compare students on national averages, but also instruction would be geared to match assessment closely; low-achieving students would receive remediation too bring them up to standard, and high-achieving students would have access to increased resources as needed for the marketplace" (McCarthey and Dressman, 2000).

Is it possible to meet the current standard expectations and provide a culturally effective climate for all students? As responsible educators it is imperative that we do. It is our responsibility to educate ALL students, and we must promote the success of all children to become literate adults. The minority population continues to escalate in the U.S. This growing minority may soon become a majority, and will hold our future in their hands. The most important reason, however, for recognizing diversity as a link to promoting literacy, is because it is ethically and morally the right thing to do.

Cultural Proficiency

An excellent model for educators to strive toward is The Cultural Proficiency Model (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 1999). In order to become culturally proficient, there are specific behaviors to acquire within yourself , your school, organizations and/or work places. These are the essential elements of Cultural Proficiency, and must be present to be successful (p. 38):

1. **Value Diversity** (Name the Differences)

- Celebrate and encourage the presence of a variety of people in all activities.
- Recognize differences as diversity rather than as inappropriate responses to the environment.
- Accept that each culture finds some values and behaviors more important than others.

2.**Assess One's Culture** (Claim Your Identity)

- Describe your own culture and the cultural norms of your organization.
- Recognize how your culture affects others.
- Understand how the culture of your organization affects those whose culture is different.

3. **Manage the Dynamics of Difference** (Frame the Conflicts)

- Learn effective strategies for resolving conflict among people whose cultural backgrounds and values may be different from yours.
- Understand the effect that historic distrust has on present day interactions.
- Realize that you may misjudge others' actions based on learned expectations.

4.**Institutionalize Cultural Knowledge** (Train About Diversity)

- Integrate into your systems for staff development and education, information and skills that enable all to interact effectively in a variety of cross-cultural situations.
- Incorporate cultural knowledge into the mainstream of the organization.
- Teach origins of stereotypes and prejudices.

5. **Adapt to Diversity** (Change for Diversity)

- Change the way things are done to acknowledge the differences that are present in the staff, patients (students), and community.
- Develop skills for cross-cultural communication
- Institutionalize cultural interventions for conflicts and confusion caused by the dynamics of difference. (p. 39)

Additionally, Lindsey, Robins and Terrell provide us with the Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency (p. 44):

- **Culture Is Ever Present**

Acknowledge culture as a predominant force in shaping behaviors, values, and institutions. Although you may be inclined to take offense at the behaviors that differ from yours, remind yourself that it may not be personal; it may be cultural.

- **People Are Served in Varying Degrees by the Dominant Culture**

What works well in organizations and in the community for you, and others who are like you, may work against members of other cultural groups. Failure to make such an acknowledgement puts the burden for change on one group.

- **People Have Group Identities and Personal Identities**

Although it is important to treat all people as individuals, it is also important to acknowledge the group identity of individuals. Actions must be taken with the awareness that the dignity of a person is not guaranteed unless the dignity of his or her people is also preserved.

- **Diversity Within Cultures Is Important**

Because diversity within cultures is as important as diversity between cultures, it is important to learn about cultural groups not as monoliths (e.g., Asians, Hispanics, gay men and women) but as the complex and diverse groups that they are. Often, because of the class differences in the United states, there will be more in common across cultural lines than within them.

- **Each Group Has Unique Cultural Needs**

Each cultural group has unique needs that cannot be met within the boundaries of the dominant culture. Expressions of one group's cultural identity do not imply a disrespect for yours. Make room in your organization for several paths that lead to the same goal.

Conclusion

As we work through these guidelines to become culturally proficient, we begin to realize what a huge task is ahead of us. If we are truly to become culturally responsive, we must take the time to learn about each other, and make personal, professional, and educational decisions based on one another's cultural perspectives. Our vision must broaden to include, understand, and accept all cultures. We must respond to one another without bias and pre-conceived notions. This will only happen through education, understanding, and compassion for human kind. It is time for all of us to take the responsibility to become culturally proficient and culturally responsive.

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